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STATE FOR WHA/CAN, CA/OCS, M/MED, and M/DASHO  
HHS FOR OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY, OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL  
AFFAIRS (STEIGER), CDC FOR GLOBAL HEALTH OFFICE (COX)

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Not SARS, Not Avian Flu - Ontario Health Officials  
Seek Identity of Killer Virus

Ref: Toronto 00153

1. SUMMARY: In a press conference on Saturday October 1, Ontario health officials announced that a respiratory illness that had killed four residents of a Toronto nursing home and affected over 70 of its staff was not SARS or avian flu-related. On Monday, October 3, Ontario's Commissioner of Emergency Management Julian Fantino told post's DPO that he was "relieved" at this finding, but still deeply concerned about the lack of specific definition of the illness. END SUMMARY.

2. Dr. Allison McGeer, a microbiologist at Mount Sinai Hospital, and Dr. Barbara Yaffee, director of communicable disease control with the City of Toronto public health department, told those in attendance at Saturday's press conference that:

- the victims had symptoms consistent with those usually seen at the beginning of the flu season;

- those who had died all had severe underlying medical conditions;

- cases were restricted to the 250-bed Seven Oaks Home for the Aged in the suburban city of Scarborough; 15 people have been hospitalized since the outbreak began on September 25, with the majority admitted on Friday, September 30, and placed in negative pressure rooms; (NOTE: See nursing home's website for additional details on this facility, [www.Toronto.ca/homesfortheaged/sevenoaks.htm](http://www.Toronto.ca/homesfortheaged/sevenoaks.htm). The center includes a childcare center. END NOTE)

- the province's health lab's excellent detection capacity was at work, with six possible viruses under suspicion: para-influenza, adenoviruses, rhinoviruses, metapneumo virus, and human coronavirusrirus; (NOTE: Coronavirusrirus caused an outbreak in Vancouver in 2003. End NOTE)

- hospitals and emergency rooms across the city were operating normally -- the admitting Centenary Hospital had taken standard added precautions, but quarantine was deemed unnecessary;

- best public precautionary practice against viral infection was frequent hand-washing.

3. DPO attended the scheduled meeting Monday morning of Toronto's Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), which featured former Toronto Police Chief and current Commissioner of Emergency Management Julian Fantino as a speaker. On greeting DPO, Fantino described himself as "relieved" by the initial findings on the Scarborough outbreak. He mentioned the impressive medical technology being employed to determine the specific nature of the illness, and made clear that its identification is a key priority for medical and civil authorities alike.

Comment

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4. Drs. McGeer and Yaffee are familiar faces from Toronto's 2003 SARS outbreak, which stunned the city with 44 deaths. Toronto Public Health decided to hold the press conference because of the sensitivity of the city to such incidents and to counter "some misinformation floating about - rumor mills." No doubt recent alarming World Health Organization predictions of a bird flu pandemic has heightened concern. Since the SARS outbreak, Ontario has become a recognized world leader on respiratory illness control and Canada has developed with the provinces a Pandemic Influenza Plan. This month Canada will host an international meeting of Ministers of Health and other senior officials from 30 countries to enhance global collaboration and coordination to combat a likely avian flu pandemic in support of the U.S.'s International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza. It will contribute C\$15 million for international initiatives related to emerging

infectious diseases.

15. Comment Continued: Reftel contains ConGen Toronto's assessment of "Lessons Learned" from the 2003 Toronto SARS outbreak, much of which would be applicable should an influenza situation occur. In September the Consulate's senior staff reviewed in detail relevant Emergency Action Plan procedures for such a contingency and the entire Consulate staff completed bio-chem training; our local medical director, Dr Howard Seiden, and a representative from the provincial Office of Emergency Management attended this training at our invitation, which was tailored to address additional influenza concerns. There was also good attendance at the recent PA-hosted DVC on avian flu with public health emergency preparedness experts from the CDC. We have undertaken efforts to keep staff and American citizens informed, but not alarmed. We will continue to monitor broader viral outbreak reports as a testing ground for awareness of our Consulate's procedures. We believe we - and the province - have done what we can to prepare for an influenza epidemic. End Comment.

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